

before their full arrival at his home, killing him.⁵²

Legislation to Affirm Coup

As protests against the actions of November 10 spread throughout the country, and local whites marshaled arguments to justify their actions, the newly elected North Carolina legislature opened its first session in January 1899. One of the new legislature's central goals was to reverse Fusion reform at every level. Wilmington's leaders took a pivotal role in some of the changes, including a complete overhaul of the city's charter because, under the existing charter, Governor Russell could again nominate Republicans to posts on the Board of Aldermen at the next election in March, 1899.

Anticipating the changes to the charter, the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce met on December 1, 1898 to discuss proposals for the upcoming legislative session. The chamber saw opportunity to lobby for other projects at both the state and national levels, including appropriations to improve the harbor and navigation along the river.⁵³ At their meeting, the Chamber appointed a five-

member committee to draft a new city charter, and "confer and advise with the representatives to the General Assembly."⁵⁴ As soon as the new legislature convened, George Rountree introduced the changes to the charter, and, after some dispute in both Wilmington and the legislature, the new charter was passed into law on March 4, 1899.⁵⁵ The changes were a complete repeal of the Fusionist alterations to the charter in 1895 and 1897. The 1899 charter solidified Democrats' control over the city. Aldermen were to be popularly elected from each ward, primaries were to be held in response to public demand, voter eligibility could be more easily challenged, and safeguards against voter fraud were strengthened. A lucrative salary was re-established for the mayor.⁵⁶ Further, the charter empowered the mayor to force unemployed "vagrants" to leave the city or work on the city's streets for thirty days if they failed to find a job.⁵⁷ Subsequent to the legislature's changes to the city charter, municipal elections were held in March 1899, and the new Board of Aldermen was elected to serve for a two-year term. Few blacks registered to vote in the election, and no Republican candidates were nominated in the two predominantly black wards, thereby

⁵² Some reports circulated through town that Bryant had been forewarned of the arrival of the mob and had been "harbored" by A. J. Taylor, white businessman. Taylor subsequently proclaimed he was not involved other than encouraging Bryant to leave the city. Bryant felt that instead of just administering a whipping, the mob intended to "pepper him with bullets from Winchesters." Another report from earlier in 1899 warned former chief of police John Melton not to return because another exile had tried to return and he had been frightened into leaving again because "one night voices were heard and forms were seen ominously circumambulating around his house . . . [it was] never learned whether it were Rough Riders or ghosts that made the manifestations." *Wilmington Messenger*, March 31 and June 18, 21, 23, 1899.

⁵³ *Wilmington Messenger* December 6, 1898.

⁵⁴ *Wilmington Messenger* December 6, 1898.

⁵⁵ Party infighting among Wilmington Democrats led to some problems in the months immediately following the violence and coup. McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 771-773.

⁵⁶ The 1866 charter established the mayor's salary at \$2,000 per year, but the 1895 and 1897 changes lowered the annual salary to \$1,000. The 1899 charter raised the salary to between \$1,200 and \$2,000 per year. *Public Laws of North Carolina, 1866, 1895, 1897*. For more notes on the changes to the city charter over time, see Appendix C.

⁵⁷ As Mayor, Waddell received an annual salary between \$1,200 and \$2,000 according to the 1899 charter. Subsequent changes were made to the charter at the 1901, 1903, and 1905 sessions. *Private Laws of the State of North Carolina Passed by the General Assembly at its Session of 1899* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton and E. M. Uzzell, 1899), 591-596.